

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 135

CG 020 308

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TITLE Gender Differences in the Relationship between Perceived Popularity and Self-Image during Early Adolescence.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Arlington, VA, April 9-12, 1987). For related document, see CG 020 307.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Junior High Schools; Longitudinal Studies; *Peer Acceptance; *Popularity; *Self Concept; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS *Early Adolescents

ABSTRACT

Girls and boys develop different value systems during early adolescence. For girls, popularity with peers assumes high priority, while for boys popularity seems to be secondary to other values established in childhood. A study was conducted to examine the relationship between popularity and adjustment, as measured by self-image, for adolescent boys and girls. Data were obtained on 106 suburban adolescents who participated in a larger longitudinal study of adolescent adjustment and development. Subjects rated self-perceptions of peer group acceptance during the spring of seventh grade. In the fall of eighth grade, subjects completed the Self-Image Questionnaire for Young Adolescents. The results showed that popularity was more consistently related to adjustment (self-image) for girls than for boys. Gender differences were observed with regard to four aspects of self-image: emotional tone, body image, coping and mastery, and (less) psychopathology. Popularity was significantly related to these aspects of self-image for girls, but not for boys. The analyses showed that perceptions of low popularity were related to low self-image on these four scales for girls, but not for boys. (Six figures of data are included.) (Author/NB)

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ED288135

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PERCEIVED POPULARITY AND SELF-IMAGE DURING EARLY ADOLESCENCE

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Poster presented at the 1987 Annual Meeting of the Eastern
Psychological Association, Arlington, VA

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ABSTRACT

Girls and boys develop different value systems during early adolescence. For girls, popularity with peers suddenly assumes high priority. Popularity is also important for boys, but is secondary to other values established in childhood (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1975; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). Because girls place higher value on popularity than boys, it seems likely that popularity would be more strongly related to adjustment for girls than for boys. Furthermore, it seems likely that perceptions of low popularity among girls would be particularly stressful, and consequently, would be more strongly related to psychopathology than in boys (Sarigiani, 1986).

This study showed that popularity was more consistently related to adjustment, as measured by self-image, for girls than for boys. Gender differences were observed with regard to four aspects of self-image: emotional tone, body image, coping and mastery, and (less) psychopathology. Popularity was significantly related to these aspects of self-image for girls, but not boys. More specifically, the analyses showed that perceptions of low popularity were related to low self-image on these four scales for girls, but not boys.

SAMPLE

The sample was comprised of 106 suburban adolescents with longitudinal data at seventh and eighth grades. These data were part of a larger longitudinal study of adolescent adjustment and development. The subjects were predominantly white and from middle and upper middle class families.

MEASURES

In the spring of the seventh grade year self perceptions of peer group acceptance were rated along a five-point scale that ranged from feeling "not at all" accepted to feeling "very accepted." In the fall of the eighth grade year self-image was assessed with the nine-scale Self-Image Questionnaire for Young Adolescents (SIQYA). The questionnaire measured these dimensions of self-image: impulse control, emotional tone, body image, peer relations, family relations, coping and mastery, vocational-educational goals, (less) psychopathology, and superior adjustment. Information demonstrating reliability and validity of the SIQYA is provided in Petersen, Schulenberg, Abramowitz, Offer, and Jarcho (1984).

METHODS

1. The relationship between perceived popularity and self-image was examined for boys and girls with separate correlations for each of the nine self-image scales.
2. Gender differences in the magnitudes of the separate correlations between perceived popularity and self-image were tested with the z test statistic.
3. Multiple regression with planned comparisons was performed to test the hypothesis of gender differences in the relationship between perceived popularity and self-image during early adolescence. Subjects' perceived popularity scores were trichotomized, resulting in three levels: low, average, and high popularity. The nine self-image scales were regressed on coded vectors representing perceived popularity, gender, and their interactions.
4. Follow-up tests of simple main effects were performed to test the hypotheses:
 - A. Perceived popularity is more strongly related to self-image for girls than for boys.
 - B. Perceptions of low popularity are related to low self-image for girls, but not boys.

RESULTS

1. Were gender differences revealed by the separate correlations between perceived popularity and self-image?

Yes, for girls all nine correlations were positive, 78% were significant, and the average correlation was .35. In contrast, for boys although most of the correlations were positive (78%), they were generally small and none were significant. The average correlation was .12 for boys.

2. Were the correlations between perceived popularity and self-image stronger (more positive) among girls than among boys?

Figure 1 shows the z statistics for the tests of gender differences in the perceived popularity/self-image correlations. In eight of the nine comparisons the correlations were stronger and more positive for girls than for boys. The popularity/self-image correlations associated with emotional tone and coping and mastery were significantly stronger for girls than for boys ($\alpha=.01$). The z statistics for gender differences were 2.70 and 2.85, respectively.

3. Were gender differences in the perceived popularity/self-image relationship revealed by the multiple regression analysis? Yes, this analysis resulted in significant interactions between perceived popularity and gender for the following indices of self-image: emotional tone, body image,

coping and mastery, and (less) psychopathology. However, not all of the self-image scales showed gender differences in the popularity/self-image relationship. For both girls and boys, popularity was significantly related to peer relations and family relations.

4. How was the relationship between perceived popularity and self-image different for girls and boys?

A. The four analyses with interaction effects were followed with tests of simple main effects, which showed that popularity accounted for a significant and meaningful proportion of the variance in self-image for girls but not boys. That is, popularity was more strongly related to these aspects of self-image for girls than for boys. Figure 2 shows gender differences in the proportion of variance (R^2) in self-image accounted for by perceived popularity.

B. Pairwise comparisons between means, within gender, showed that girls who perceived themselves to be low in popularity, had relatively low self-images. Gender differences in the relationships between perceived popularity and self-image are shown in Figures 3-6.

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POPULARITY/SELF-IMAGE CORRELATION

GREATER AMONG GIRLS THAN BOYS

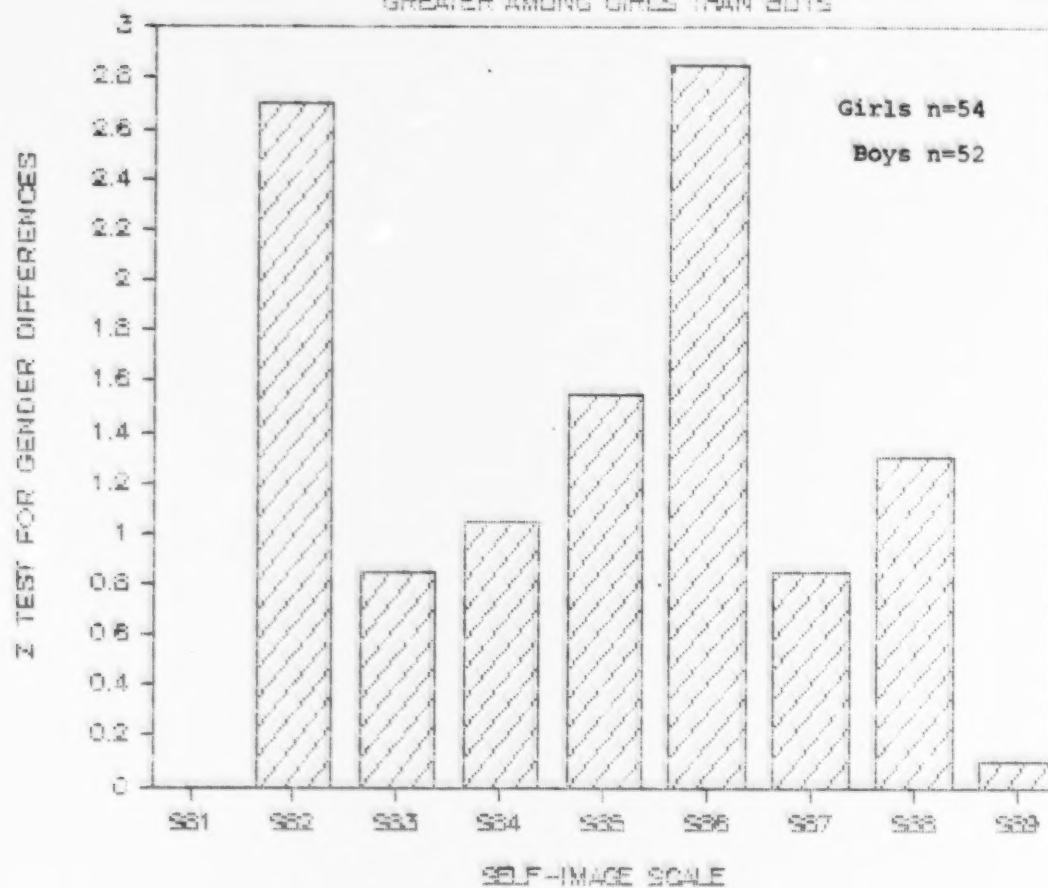


FIGURE 1

SELF-IMAGE REGRESSED ON POPULARITY:

GENDER DIFFERENCES

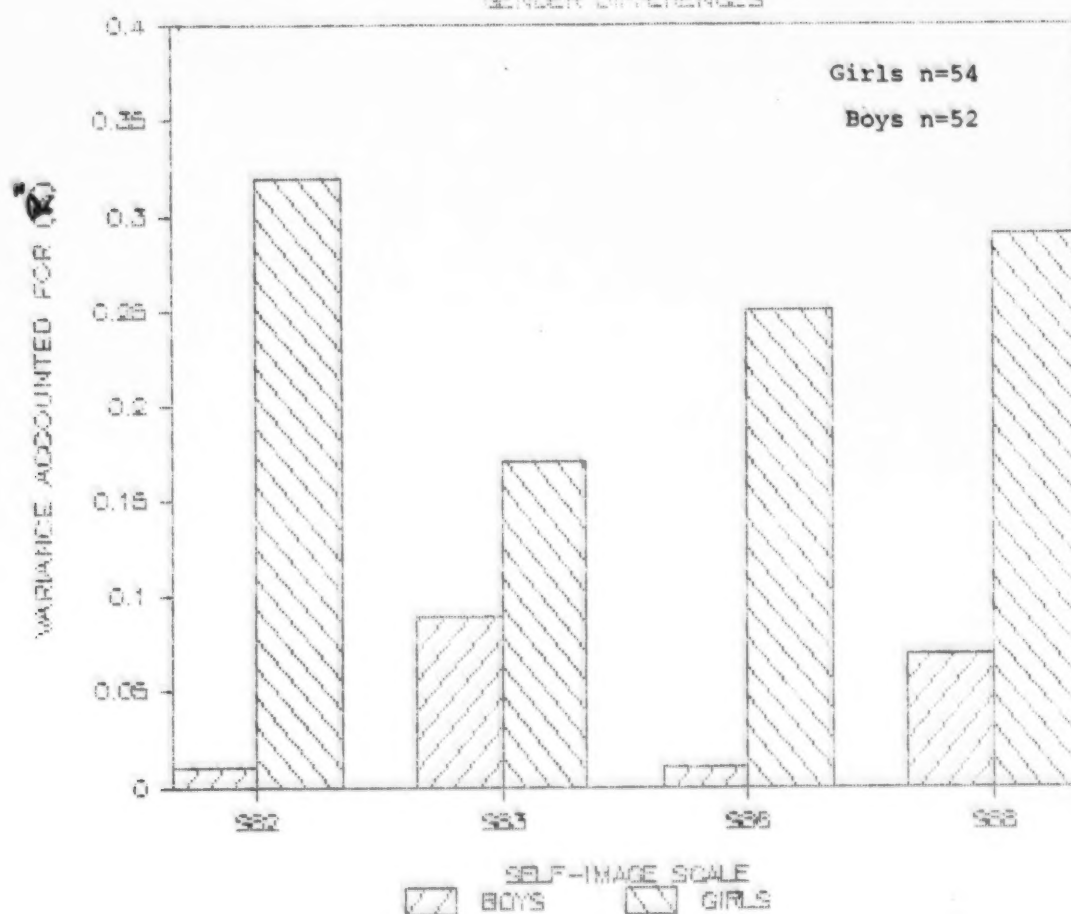


FIGURE 2

SELF-IMAGE/POPULARITY RELATIONSHIP

GENDER DIFFERENCES

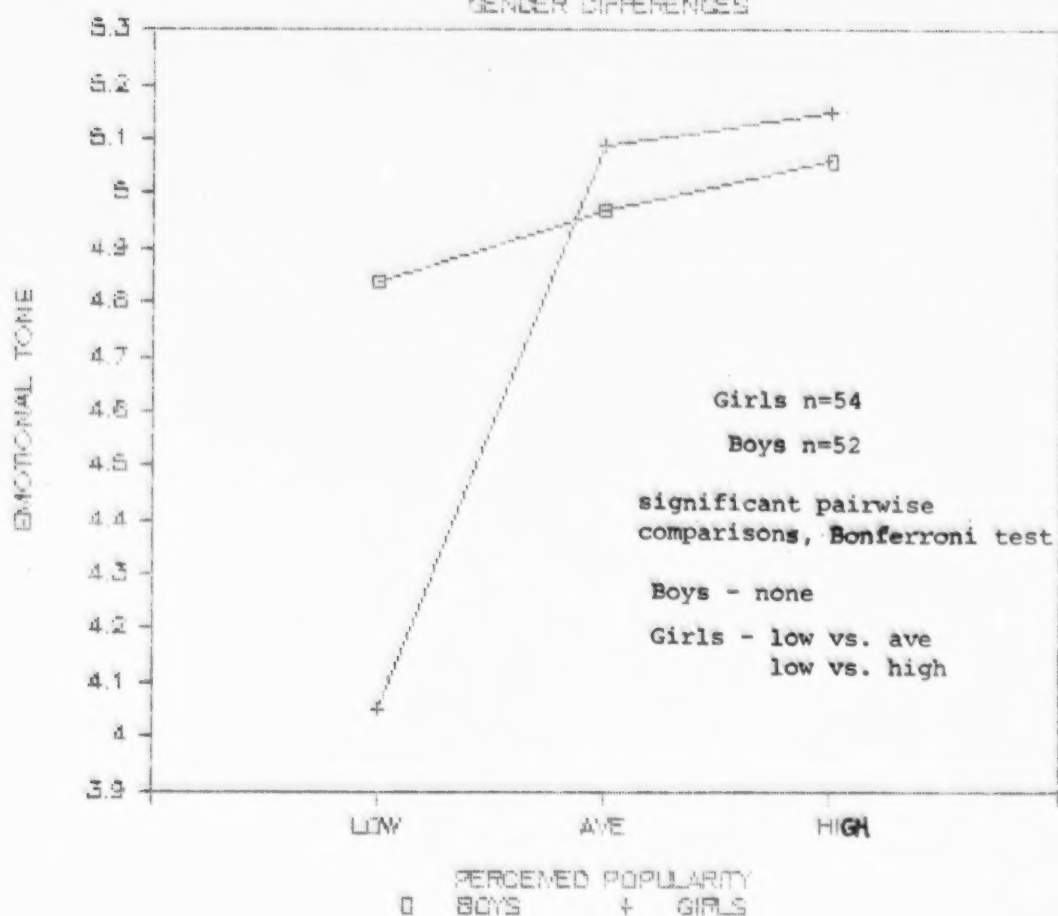


FIGURE 3

SELF-IMAGE/POPULARITY RELATIONSHIP

GENDER DIFFERENCES

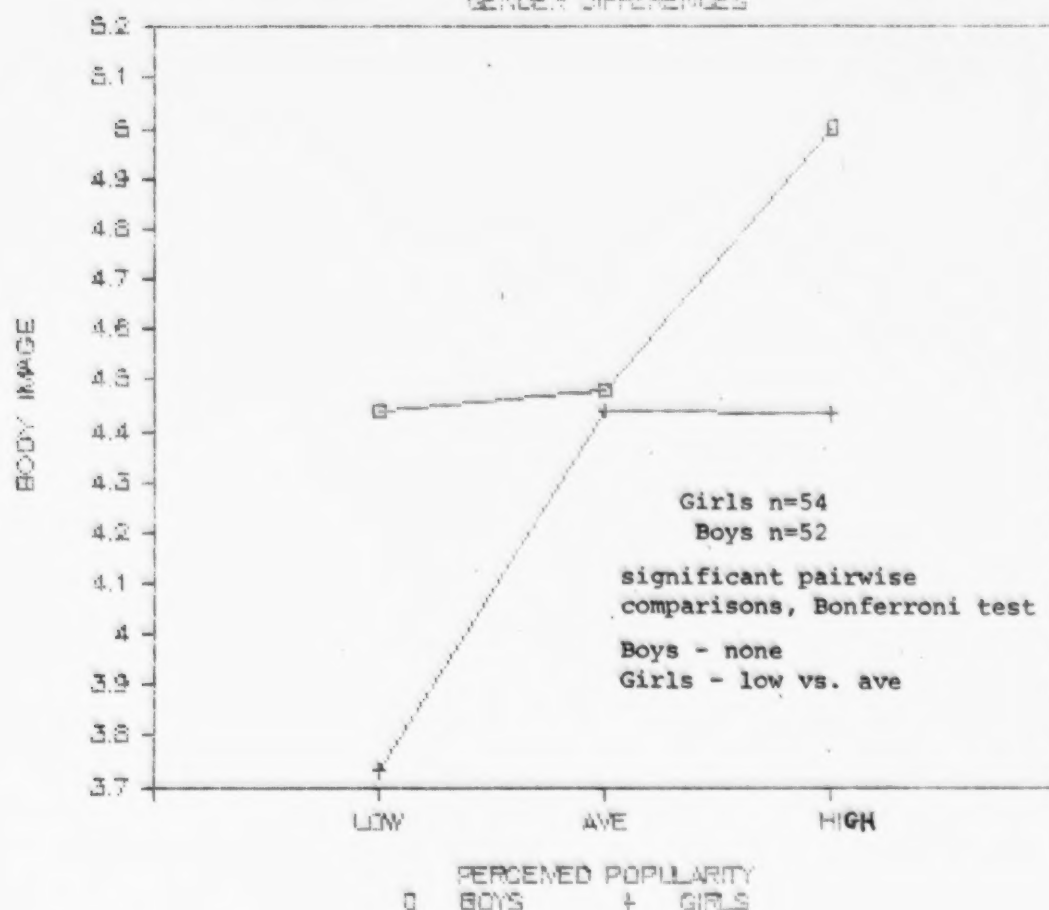


FIGURE 4

SELF-IMAGE/POPULARITY RELATIONSHIP

GENDER DIFFERENCES

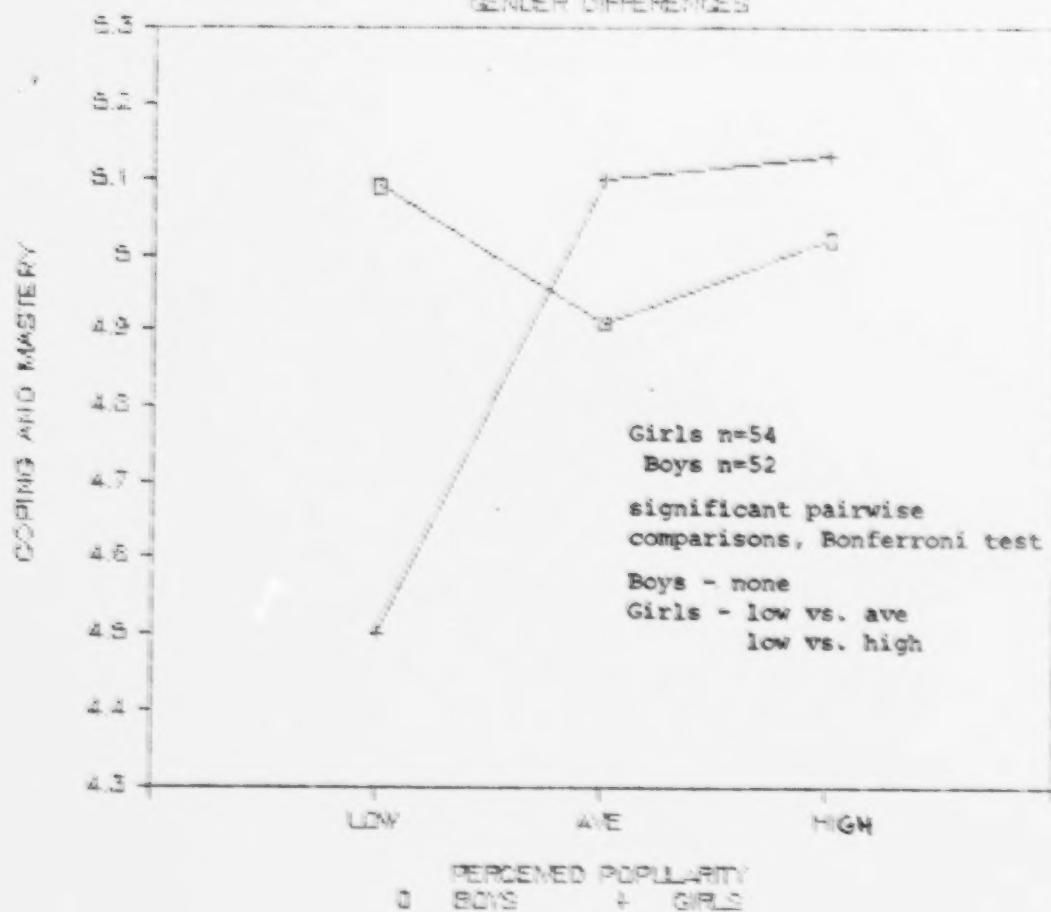


FIGURE 5

SELF-IMAGE/POPULARITY RELATIONSHIP

GENDER DIFFERENCES

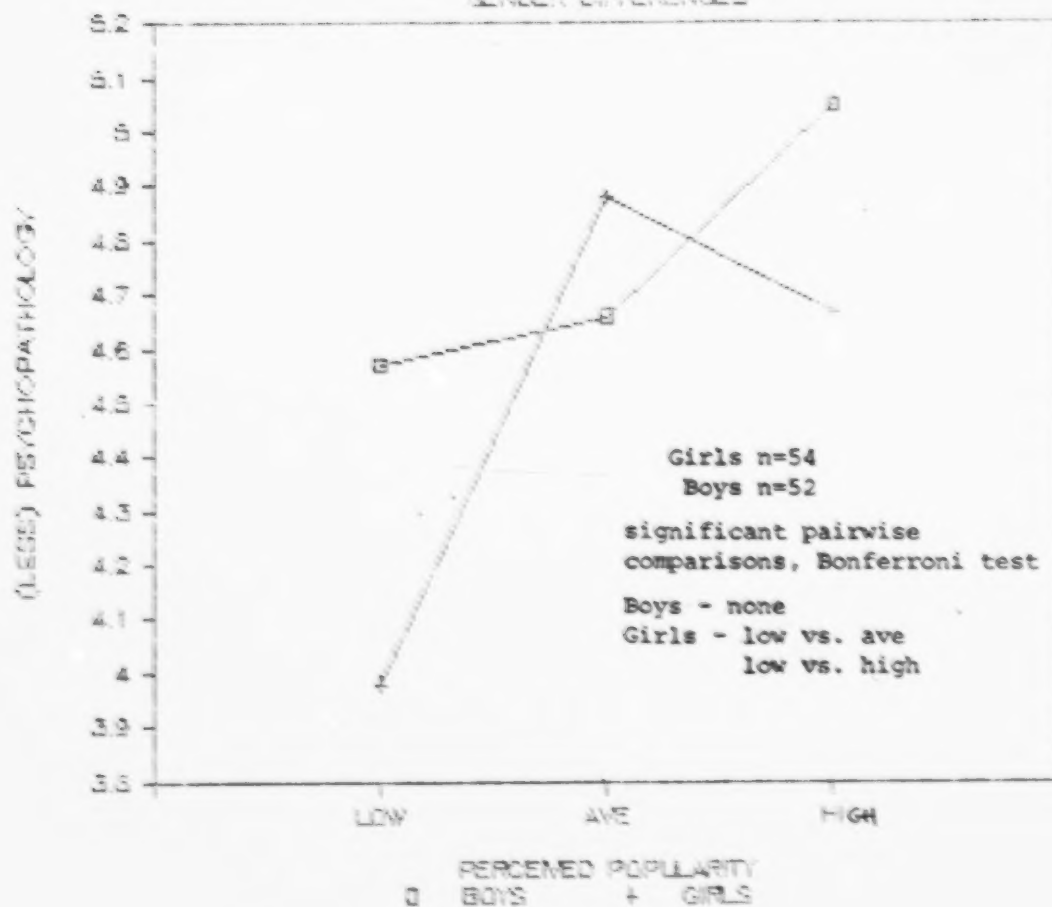


FIGURE 6